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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

*Formally
Staff memo 35-72
L.P. Staff memo 7-72*

31 August 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Chile: But What if There is a Military Coup?*

A new round of political street clashes and renewed reporting of coup plotting serve to call attention once again to the prospects for the Allende regime in Chile. The major judgments of the recent estimate (NIE 94-72: "Chile: The Alternatives Facing the Allende Regime," 29 June 1972) appear to be in better shape than Dr. Allende's political and economic programs. We still believe that a military coup to overthrow Allende is unlikely, at least between now and the March 1973 congressional election. But, as indicated in the estimate, certain contingencies, such as a breakdown in public order or an attempt by Allende to subvert the constitution, could considerably increase the chances for a coup. The main purpose of this Memorandum is to assess the factors likely to influence the character of a coup -- if there is one.

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* *This paper has been discussed with other components within CIA, but has not been formally coordinated.*

Classified by:	
Exempt from general declassification schedule of E. O. 11652, exemption category: 5B(2),(3).	
Automatically declassified on approval of DCI	

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1. Political tensions and disorders are again on the rise in Chile. Confrontations in the streets between antagonistic political groups or between such groups and the authorities appear to be occurring with greater frequency than at any time since Allende and his Popular Unity (UP) government took office, not only in Santiago but in various outlying cities and towns as well. These routinely produce forceful interventions by the *Carabineros* (national police), injuries and arrests, and charges and countercharges indicting the purposes and patriotism of the government and the opposition. Along with the recent spate of urban disorders there has been a series of shoot-outs in the countryside involving disputes over recently expropriated farms, in which several peasants have been killed. As the political violence has accelerated, so has the threatening tone of the rhetoric issuing from all political sides.

2. Underlying the tensions and the disorders, and likely to sustain them at a fairly high level, are (a) a worsening economic situation characterized by declining output, rampant inflation, growing shortages of consumer goods, and a seemingly hopeless crisis in foreign payments; (b) a growing need for the major parties preparing to contest the March 1973 election to get in as many political ticks as possible; and (c) increased

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provocative activity by groups on both political extremes who have no use for elections as a means for advancing their objectives.

3. Not unexpectedly, the rise in political fever and the economic malaise have produced a rash of reports of coup plotting within the military and among civilians on the far right. If taken literally, these reports would indicate that a growing number of military and civilian notables have come to the conclusion that a coup is inevitable -- that the constitutional system cannot remain intact until the next presidential election in 1976; some say it will not last until the congressional elections next March.

4. Our first reaction is that the government and its supporters are getting a bit more panicky, the opposition a bit more combative, the military and the *Carabineros* a bit more fed up with the political and economic mess. But so far *only a bit*. Thus we still come up with the judgment that a military coup is unlikely, at least until the results and political consequences of next year's election are known. We would like, however, to call attention to the several qualifications to the statement on the matter in the recent estimate (NIE 94-72: "Chile: The Alternatives Facing the Allende Regime", 29 June 1972):

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Barring an effort by Allende at radicalization and repression, the chances of ... his removal from office over the next year or so ... are relatively small. Despite uneasiness about the recent course of events in Chile, the security forces do not now appear willing to mount a coup. Their strong tradition is not to become engaged directly in the political process; if forced to intervene they would prefer to apply pressure on the President to moderate his policies, rather than to overthrow him. A vital factor in any decision by the military to intervene would be their perception of the popular consensus at the time. Among the contingencies that would increase the likelihood of action by the military would be a blatantly unconstitutional act by Allende, a real or threatened breakdown in public order, or threats to the military's institutional integrity.

5. Regarding the present situation in Chile, we believe the major leaders of the opposing political camps will probably take some initiative to ease the tensions and disorders before the military leadership prepares itself to intervene. Failing this, we would expect something like the following sequence: The majors and colonels will gripe to the generals. The generals will complain to Commander-in-Chief Prats. General Prats will lay it on the line to President Allende. Allende will arrange a meeting between the leaders of the contending political camps. These professional conciliators will devise some new palliative to calm the country. Since neither the civilian nor the military *jefes* really want a coup, the politicians can and will come up with something good enough to convince the generals and in turn the colonels -- at

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least for a while. In short, though the military may get heavily engaged in the political process if a major crisis develops, their initial intervention would probably be to apply pressures on Allende and the other political leaders in order to avoid a coup.

6. But what if things do not work out this way and the military do launch an effort to overthrow the government -- because Allende loses his head, or the political conciliators fail to conciliate, or the colonels refuse to accept Prats' reassurances? Or because a series of violent episodes brings a breakdown of public order?

7. Perhaps the beginning of wisdom in writing about a *golpe* that seems neither imminent nor inevitable would be to observe that its character will depend largely on the circumstances that force an upset of the odds. We think it helpful, therefore, to examine some of the key variables that already influence the chances of a coup taking place, and are likely to affect the course and character of a coup -- if there is one.

8. The first key variable would be *the degree of unity within the military*. We know relatively little about the most influential individual officers and next-to-nothing about most others.

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[REDACTED] Our strong impression, however, is that institutional unity is a high priority consideration for nearly all Chilean officers -- even most of those now plotting against Allende. So far, the few conspirators we know of do not have broad support among their military colleagues and appear to be searching for a pretext to gain such a consensus. Even most coup-minded officers would probably prefer to see the military institution stand united and protect "national interests" by putting pressure on Allende to modify his policies, rather than to launch a coup attempt that might badly divide the military. Some key officers who are not themselves involved in plotting allegedly now believe that a coup is inevitable. But that probably means they feel "we will *all* know it and be ready when the times comes."

9. We know less about the leaders of the *Carabineros* than about those of the military. There is traditional institutional rivalry and probably daily operational friction between the police and the army. But the *Carabinero* officers are disgruntled over the same economic and political developments that bother their military counterparts (and many civilians). Thus, the stronger the consensus for a coup within the military the more likely the

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Carabineros are either to participate actively in the coup or at least to do nothing to block it. If the military were to split with only a minority for the coup-makers, most of the *Carabineros* would probably stand aside or join the military majority in support of the Allende government. But a straight-out fight pitting the *Carabineros* against a united military seems highly unlikely.

10. *The extent of support among political groups* would also be a major factor determining the course and character of a coup. At present, though individuals in various groups may see a coup as inevitable, only the far-right Fatherland and Freedom Movement and perhaps a minority of the conservative National Party appear to support an immediate military move against Allende. Most Christian Democrats (PDC), the largest opposition party, are eager to contest the congressional elections next March and would probably like to nurse the present political system along until the 1976 presidential election. If the Christian Democrats felt that Allende were out to subvert the constitution so as to perpetuate UP rule, or that a breakdown in the economy or in public order threatened national disaster, and that there was no effective "fix" that the politicians could apply to the situation, they would accept a coup as a lesser evil. And if before they reached such conclusions on their own, a coup by a united military appeared

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imminent, many political moderates in and out of the PDC would reluctantly support the move, in order to minimize the bloodshed and to maximize their influence on the resultant junta.

11. *Allende's reaction* would be another key variable. His public line is that he will not be forced prematurely from office, except by a bullet. And his first instinct will be to counter and resist any military move against him. He has assiduously cultivated the military's favor and he has tied them to *his* defense during several of the recent disturbances by declaring local states of emergency that place the generals in charge of law and order. If all else failed in a crisis, Allende would probably attempt to make a political deal -- with his political opposition or with the military establishment -- in order to abate the pressures behind the latter's rancor. If this failed and if the military leaders split over the issue of a coup attempt, Allende would hope to prevail behind the "loyalist" forces. But what if the military were united against him and unappeasable, or if the military and the population in general were so evenly divided that a civil war threatened? It is extremely difficult to anticipate how Allende -- at once, Chilean statesman and ambitious politician, would-be revolutionary and lover of the good life, expert conciliator and manipulator -- would react under such awesome responsibility. Would he sacrifice his office and revolution to minimize bloodshed, and perhaps to save his own hide?

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12. What of *the extent of resistance to a coup by pro-revolutionary political forces*? Again, whatever their rhetoric in nickle-and-dime crises, an historic national crisis can call forth unpredictable chemical reactions even from self-proclaimed revolutionary groups. So it depends in good part on the circumstances. It depends as well on what Allende does. If Allende resists, the various revolutionary groups would probably stand fast, with the possible exception of some middle-class Radical Party members and some timid Communists. If Allende folded his cards, the chances are that most Radicals and Communists and a good number of Socialists would also accept the inevitable. The diehards under such circumstances would be the hardline Socialists and the extremist minigroups in and out of the UP, including the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR).

13. *Popular reactions*, perhaps the final key to the course of a coup, would depend in good part on the variables already mentioned. Large numbers of Chileans are already antagonistic to the government. This antagonism will spread as economic conditions worsen. Rather than a military coup, however, most Chileans would probably prefer to see either Allende change his policies or some well-known civilian leader replace him in office. But we do not think that the Chilean population despises the

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military per se or fears the worst for their welfare from military rule. There would be a lot of wind-sniffing to see where prominent national leaders stood and what the coup-makers promised in terms of political and economic policies.

Some Tentative Conclusions

14. We do not discount completely a coup attempt by a small minority of military officers and political leaders -- essentially a rightist *putsch*. But we think that a *nearly essential condition* to a successful coup against Allende would be the achievement of broad support in the military and of at least tacit support among major elements of the *Carabineros*, the political opposition, and the general public. The political and economic situation in Chile, then, would have to deteriorate to the point where much of the population had concluded, readily or reluctantly, that Allende could not or would not take remedial action and the military had to move against him to save the nation from disaster.

15. There would doubtless be fierce resistance by the extreme left. Whether the resistance would be a combination of hit-and-run terrorism, sporadic demonstrations, and guerrilla warfare in remote areas on the one hand -- or civil war on the other hand, would depend heavily, in the final analysis, on

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Allende's course of action. The MIR and other extremists have formed paramilitary groups and formulated plans for resistance to a coup based on broad support from the workers and peasants. We doubt that large numbers would follow the lead of the extremists, however, if Allende called for peace or was equivocal. Since he has kept on such good personal terms with military leaders, since the opposition politicians and perhaps the Communists would be urging him to accept the inevitable, and since he would probably consider a bloody civil war a worse disaster than his loss of office, Allende -- under the extreme circumstances we have painted -- would probably call for peace.

16. What if the military were obviously split, but with a majority *against* Allende? He might miscalculate the extent of the opposition to his rule and call for armed resistance to rally the "loyalist" military to his cause. But even in such a confused situation, where the outcome of a civil war was unclear, we believe Allende's fears of extensive bloodletting would place the odds against his calling for an all-out armed struggle to save his regime.

17. Some final words on possible US involvement in the wake of a successful military coup or a failed *putsch* in Chile. Few nations in the hemisphere are likely to be neutral in spirit as

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well as deed in such circumstances, and any premature actions from Washington would be construed as "Yankee Imperialism." Cuba in particular would accuse the US of being behind the coup, and might find some believers, but could itself do very little to affect the outcome. There would be some minor activity from Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and even Brazil (through Bolivia perhaps) -- mostly on the side of the military coup-makers.

18. If there is a civil war, especially a prolonged struggle, there would probably be pressures for the US to become openly involved to some extent, whether or not it particularly wanted to. There are US nationals who might become hostages. Reports of real or alleged Cuban or Soviet intervention are likely. One side within Chile might call for our help while the other side charged that we were already intervening illegally. There might be calls from the OAS and UN to organize an effort to stop the bloodshed. But now we are talking of contingencies related to the worst possible case of an unlikely development.

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1 September 1972

Memo from -
J. FOSTER COLLINS

TO: Harvey Summ
Room 7533 - State

I am sending you for your background use a Memo on Chile we did for our Director because of the recent reporting on political tensions and coup plotting. As you can see we have not changed the basic estimates on the recent NIE 94-72.

1 September 1972

Memo from -
J. FOSTER COLLINS

TO: Dan Bowen
Room 4328 - Treasury

I am sending you for your background use a Memo on Chile we did for our Director because of the recent reporting on political tensions and coup plotting. As you can see we have not changed the basic estimates on the recent NIE 94-72.

Chile

1 September 1972

SUBJECT: Other Outside Distribution of MEMORANDUM: Chile: But
What if There is a Military Coup?

STATE: Mr. John H. Crimmins (ARA)
Mr. G. Harvey Summ (INR)
Mr. Ray Cline (INR)

NSC: Mr. Kennedy
Mr. William Jorden

TREASURY: Mr. Dan Bowen

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. John W. Fisher
Dept. of State - Room 5262

Enclosed is a copy of a memorandum that the Office of National Estimates prepared for the Director of Central Intelligence. Because of the recent reports of political disorders and coup plotting in Chile, I sent a copy to John Crimmins and thought you would also like to see it.

J. Foster Collins
J. Foster Collins
Member,
Board of National Estimates

5 September 1972
(DATE)

FORM NO.
10-101

REPLACES FORM 10-101
WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

MEMORANDUM FOR: Col. Richard Kennedy
NSC Staff

Mr. Helms suggested to me that you might find
this piece of interest.


JOHN HUIZENGA
Director
National Estimates

1 September 1972
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED

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